

TERM: Spring 2025
COURSE NUMBER & CATEGORY: ENGL 3100: Pre-1800 Literature
COURSE TITLE: Heretics, Monsters, and Poets
SECTION TIMES/DAYS: TR 9:55-11:35 am
INSTRUCTOR: Shepherd

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS:

This course examines constructions of extreme otherness in medieval English literature. The governing idea of the course is that spiritual orthodoxy, heresy (the state of being outcast by orthodox spiritual ideology), and alterity are always elastic and ambiguous concepts; they emerge out of and are persistently renegotiated through conflicts and narratives of varying degrees of severity, intense emotion, even transcendent beauty. Attending to theological, linguistic, philosophical, historical, gender, cultural, and political issues, students will examine major themes, including heresy and orthodoxy, reform, mysticism, vernacularity, the spirituality of women, crusade, witchcraft, and monsters and magic.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will develop a familiarity with landmark texts in the English medieval literary tradition as they stand beside landmark spiritual and ideological controversies of the period. Allegory is perhaps the major literary modality to which students will be exposed, but satire will come a close second, followed by the more fantastical and experimental elements of romance and ecstatic visions.

Students will gain an understanding of orthodoxy, heterodoxy, heresy, and otherness as expressed in medieval English and texts. As an example of course content, of note in the English tradition is the emergence, in the context of the most significant medieval English heresy, Lollardy, of the first named women writers, who were constantly under threat of ecclesiastical inquisition and censure for even approaching the forbidden role of “rabbi” or “teacher.” Some of the readings go so far as to invite comparison of such potentially heretical authors to monstrous shape-shifters (“Loathly Ladies”), witches, and denizens of hell. On a more positive note, those and other texts invert traditional associations and go so far as to suggest such concepts as Christ-as-mother, salvation without sacraments, and writing in “lowly” English as a form of deep spiritual expression.

CLASS LEVEL RESTRICTION:

Junior/Senior Only

RECOMMENDED/PREREQUISITES:

English Major/Minor

COURSE ATTRIBUTES:

OLD CURRICULUM

- GENRES (LD)
- HISTORIES (LD)
- AUTHORS (UD)
- CRITICAL/THEORETICAL (UD)
- COMPARATIVE (UD)
- CREATIVE/ARTISTRY (UD)

NEW CURRICULUM

- DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH (LD)
- HISTORY OF LIT, MEDIA, AND CULTURE (LD)
- READING AND WRITING GENRES (LD)
- THEORY, POWER, AND RHETORIC (LD)
- PRE-1800 (UD)
- CREATIVE ARTISTRY (UD)
- RACE, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND POWER (UD)
- UPPER-DIVISION ELECTIVE (UD)
- 5000-LEVEL SEMINAR (UD)

CORE ATTRIBUTES:

N/A